

# Kunapipi

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Volume 12 | Issue 1

Article 5

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1990

## Poems

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### Recommended Citation

Taylor, Andrew, Poems, *Kunapipi*, 12(1), 1990.

Available at: <https://ro.uow.edu.au/kunapipi/vol12/iss1/5>

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## Poems

### Abstract

WALLUF AM RHEIN for Beate, THE CHAIRPERSON'S OFFICE, FOR ROBERTA ,

# Andrew Taylor

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## WALLUF AM RHEIN

*for Beate*

I should have known, loving a Rhinemaiden  
I'd marry more than a lyrical bit  
of the chorus. Even your parents' address  
- Parsifalstrasse - was a warning. Yet neither myth  
nor opera is your domain. Something else  
anchors you here, no matter how far  
you go from it with me. History  
as love, perhaps, of a steady turning of stones  
in a landscape heavy with stones that impress  
what they conceal.

For you it's printed  
with their words: stories cross and divide  
among alders, vineyards, stretches of untouched  
wood. Like tributaries of a bishopric  
or of the Rhine, they embrace  
cloisters, castles, schools - schools of philosophy  
music, arts and arms. And the school  
you succeeded your mother to, which  
our daughter also one day will attend.

Despite the stones, and the crushing weight  
of arms - from Caesar's, who crossed the Rhine  
a few minutes march from here, to the pulse  
of U.S. helicopters every day -  
this valley is less tangible  
than its earth, and reaches further.  
Between history and love, it lives in the changes  
of your mood when, thoughtful and homesick  
you're among my friends, my familiar landscape  
wrapping you in its exile, and  
in your tears at times, when we make love.

This is the valley's embrace, as our daughter  
signalled I don't know how, but drawn  
by the force of where she came from, races  
to hug us both, as we hold each other and kiss.  
No matter how old she grows, how far she travels  
this, I pray, won't leave her alone. That's how  
the Rhine flows in your veins.

I love you

as best I can, but I can't replace that,  
what you left to live with me - a stranger too  
beside your river, though a little less  
than most, I hope, as our daughter holds our hands.

## THE CHAIRPERSON'S OFFICE

The Chairperson's office  
is the one office  
without a nametag.  
It contains a desk,  
a personal computer,  
some filing cabinets  
and a Chairperson.

There are two phones  
on the Chairperson's desk.  
One goes via a secretary  
to the outside world.  
The other is wired directly  
to Hell. This is the phone  
the Chairperson wants disconnected.

He has spent several months  
arguing with his secretary,  
with the head of Personnel  
and with the telephone authority.  
They all maintain  
a direct line to Hell  
cannot be disconnected.

The Chairperson disagrees  
and has sent several memos  
to that - but no other -  
effect. Right now  
he's angrily signing directives,  
stabbing into the space  
of that first shrill cry.

## FOR ROBERTA

I'll bet, Roberta  
your first sense that something was wrong  
in that plane didn't steer  
your thoughts to me.

At 12,000 feet  
you couldn't drown and your mind reeled back  
through your past to how our lives  
sadly, badly untwined.

I'll bet your thought  
went to those you loved then, buckled in the small  
and malfunctioning plane  
and the ground below

I bet was closer  
than you guessed, a mountain erupting  
seconds ahead and you  
and your thoughts clutched

on an instant of panic.  
Then nothing but flames and fragments  
in an unvisited  
fraction of Africa.

And if I claimed  
I didn't care that in that terrible  
impact with reality  
you didn't think of me

I'll bet, Roberta  
you'd rise like an avenging angel  
to scourge me, nightly  
with pure grief, and scorn.

## Stephen Oliver

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### TAKE A WALK

Disturbed movement in  
alleys. A shift in wind  
direction. Further  
off over roofs, patches  
of light. It is the  
signals that, pushed out,  
are coming back in  
across the buffed zones  
and upended days,  
down the familiar track  
of childhood, the  
neighbour yelling from  
behind hedges, destination  
of the stone sure.  
Somehow we soften into  
the sum of all we haven't  
done, seated high on  
windy terraces, one step  
from that which may  
have occurred, outlined  
there in silhouette,  
hurtful against the sky.  
The birds celebrated as you  
dressed with stealth  
though you'd gone long before  
first light took you.